

This week's *Fortuna Glimpses*, number 34 in the series, discusses how Fortuna Villa could provide an opportunity to celebrate our German pioneers and their contribution to Bendigo's development.

In last week's 'Fortuna Glimpse', the possible future use of Fortuna Villa as a museum of Bendigo was considered.

Among the suggestions for inclusion in such an attraction was a museum display commemorating Bendigo's long-neglected German pioneers. Reader response to this idea being positive — indeed, enthusiastic — it seems appropriate to explore it a little further.

This week's article, therefore, takes a closer look at the contribution of the 19thC German settlers to the development of Bendigo, with particular focus on German links with Fortuna.

During the mid-19thC, the Germans were the third largest ethnic group on the Bendigo goldfields, after the British and the Chinese. It is estimated that by 1860, the German-born population on the Bendigo goldfield was in the region of 2000-3000, of whom a significant number were miners from the Harz mountains. It is not surprising that the Germans were the leaders in the development of quartz-mining at Sandhurst.

By 1853, the alluvial gold was largely exhausted. The more experienced miners realised that working the quartz reefs could be profitable, but the need for specialised equipment to make it pay was a deterrent to many, who sought alternative occupations or new alluvial fields.

The German miner Christopher Ballerstedt, however, was not deterred. With his son Theodore, he had arrived in Sandhurst in 1852 from California. Ballerstedt purchased a claim on Victoria Hill, set up a horse-driven quartz crusher, and was so successful that within two years he was employing 12 men. By 1856, Ballerstedt — soon to be known as the 'Father of the Hill' — had built a handsome brick residence at the top of Victoria Hill, overlooking his claim. He named it Fortuna Villa.



Like the Ballerstedts, George Lansell believed in the profitability of the quartz reefs, and invested in mining ventures every available penny he earned from the Lansell brothers' soap and tallow business at View Point. One early foray in which he had an interest was the sinking of a shaft in the grounds of what later became his home, Fortuna.

In the 1850s, Victoria Hill and the surrounding area was dominated by German miners and claim owners. Names from this place and period which remain familiar to Bendigonians today include Wittscheibe, Koch, Killian, Ketterer, and Roeder.

Christopher Ballerstedt died in 1869. In 1871, his son Theodore decided to return to Germany. In a deal brokered by the German businessman and mining investor, Ernst Mueller, George Lansell bought Ballerstedt's '180' mine, along with his handsome house on Victoria Hill. Mueller's commission on the sale provided the foundation of his fortune; the Mueller home, Lancewood House in McLaren Street, would become, like Lansell's Fortuna Villa, an important centre of social and cultural life in Bendigo in the late 19thC.

In the decades following his purchase of the property, Lansell's Fortuna Villa was transformed. The architectural history of the house having been outlined in an earlier article (see *Fortuna Glimpses* number 21), there is no need for detail here, except to note that, prominent among the various architects who contributed to the changes, were three Germans — William Vahland, Robert Getzsch-



FORTUNA VILLA: A future for our past?

Picture: JULIAN PROWD

mann, and Emil Mauermann. Of the three, William Vahland is without doubt the most significant. In a long career, Vahland designed some of Bendigo's finest buildings, including churches, banks, hotels, hospitals, shops, and private residences.

Many Germans were employed by George Lansell, both in his numerous mines, and at his home.

Andrew (Andreas) Stichman, a native of Brunswick, Germany, arrived in Bendigo as a young man in the early 1860s. He was employed at Fortuna for 55 years. Two of Stichman's daughters, Annie and Minnie, also worked at Fortuna, and were beneficiaries in Edith Lansell's will.

Louisa Waswo, daughter of German miner and mine manager Heinrich Waswo, was employed as a cook at Fortuna for several years, and kept a detailed record of meals prepared for the family during that time, along with their favourite recipes.

Late 19thC Sandhurst experienced a cultural burgeoning, in which the German community played a leading role. Three daughters of German-born identities would achieve international recognition as opera singers. The first was Bertha Rossow, whose father was Sandhurst mine manager Theodor Rossow. Next was Kate Samuels, daughter of another Ger-

man mine manager, Louis Samuels. And Ernst Mueller's daughter, Erna, also made her name in the great opera houses of Europe.

In addition to their contribution to the cultural life of Bendigo, German settlers were prominent in commerce, with the development of the local wine industry, and in trade and professions.

My uncle, Conrad Bode, was a carpenter. His son Albert was an architect. The German priest, Dr Henry Backhaus, celebrated the first Mass on the Bendigo goldfields in 1852. Pastor Friedrich Leyboldt served the Lutheran congregation for over 50 years. Julius Groening, who arrived in Sandhurst in 1853, was one of Bendigo's earliest chemists. German-born butcher, Conrad Heinz, was Mayor of Bendigo in 1894-5.

With the outbreak of war in 1914, some local families of German descent opted to change their names, or at least the spelling. Jung, for example, became Young. Niewand became Neaven. Humme became Hume. But the majority of the names of the German pioneers in Bendigo retain their original form, and are borne with pride by their descendants. A quick look in the local telephone book reveals Ketterers, Drechslers, Ludemans, Niemanns, Ruffs, Rothackers, Muellers, and Schultzes in abun-

dance, plus a healthy smattering of Schleigers, Vogeles, Wiegards, Wusts, and others.

Good Aussies now, as are we all! But as we hurtle through the first decade of the 21st century, we should not forget our immigrant past, or the risks taken and the sacrifices made by those who built the future that is our present. Their achievement is immense.

Descendants of Bendigo's pioneering Chinese community have set a brilliant example. The Chinese Museum and gardens in Bridge Street are an inspiration. It is time that Bendigo remembered ALL of its pioneers.

We have the venue. We have the stories. We have the collections, the artifacts, the family memorabilia.

We just need to find a way to put them together.

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■ Next week: The Significance of Fortuna Villa.